

Buffalo Mountain Bike Trails Project
Ms. Leslie Morgan, District Ranger
4900 Asheville Hwy SR70
Greeneville, TN 37743

Ms. Morgan,

SORBA Tri-Cities, a chapter of IMBA/SORBA, would like to thank the US Forest Service for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposed Buffalo Mountain bike trails as we share a vision of sustainable outdoor recreation on the Cherokee National Forest and a desire to improve public access and appreciation of this public asset.

SORBA Tri-Cities is excited to support the proposed establishment of the 5.05 miles of trail currently existing on the abandoned skid trails and logging roads.

The 2004 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan states that “recreation opportunities which are unique or of exceptional long-term value in a manner that focuses on maximizing visitor satisfaction within financial and environmental limitations” must be considered (*Chapter 2 – Forestwide Direction; Recreation – Developed, Dispersed, and Backcountry, p.56*). SORBA Tri-Cities recognizes the need for a backcountry trail experience in the greater Tri-Cities region as well as the need for volunteer support for properly managing recreational assets on Forest Service lands. The chapter aims to be a resource for the forest and is anticipating a mutually beneficial long-term relationship. The mountain bike proposal accomplishes both goals of maximizing visitor satisfaction while remaining conscious of the limited resources of the Forest Service staff by working and partnering with SORBA Tri-Cities.

The property is uniquely positioned within six miles of downtown Johnson City where mountain biking is exploding in popularity and is fully supported by the city of Johnson City, other surrounding counties and cities, and the Northeast Tennessee Regional Economic Partnership. This also gives it exceptional long-term value as these trails will help fulfill the void of close proximity backcountry trails for hiking, trail running, and mountain biking, accomplishing Goal 35 of providing ““backcountry” (semi-primitive motorized and non-motorized/remote) recreation experiences that are generally not available on other land ownerships” (*Chapter 2 – Forestwide Direction; Recreation – Developed, Dispersed, and Backcountry, p.57*).

The proposed 5.05-mile trail system can easily be connected to the 5.9-mile Pinnacle Mountain Trail and Pinnacle Mountain Fire Tower. The Pinnacle Mountain Trail is accessible from exit 32 off I-26 and is an extremely popular trail for non-motorized users because of its ease of trail access and fire tower destination. With the addition of the 5.05 miles of trail, users of the Pinnacle Mountain Trail could easily extend their backcountry experience to more than 20 miles by utilizing FDR 4354A (Upper Briar Creek Spur), FDR 4354 (Upper Briar Creek Road), and FDR 188 (Briar Creek Rd.).

Other goals indicated in the revised management plan that are accomplished by this proposal include:

GOAL 32: Develop, enhance, and maintain systems of non-motorized and motorized trails within the capabilities of the land and appropriate to the desired ROS class. Emphasize multi-use non-motorized trails where appropriate and where user conflict can be minimized. Provide separate-use trails where necessary to reduce user conflicts or to improve the quality of recreation experiences.

GOAL 33: Emphasize opportunities to create networks and loops for new trail construction.

Buffalo Mountain (MA 8; Rx 7.C) has limitless opportunities for future expansion to create loop trails and network systems as “new routes are considered for development only when there is a demonstrated need, interest, and a developed partnership with user groups” (*PRESCRIPTION 7.C - OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE USE AREAS p.124*).

The Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association and SORBA Tri-Cities are dedicated partners with the USFS with regards to all multi-use non-motorized trail construction and maintenance. The trails and Forest Service staff will benefit from a proven and dedicated partner in SORBA Tri-Cities, an IMBA/SORBA chapter, by utilizing its growing network of experienced trail stewards, non-profit status for projects and funding, and its access to professional staff through parent organizations SORBA and IMBA.

About SORBA Tri-Cities

Founded in 1998, SORBA Tri-Cities is the regional leader in trail stewardship and mountain biking advocacy and utilizes sustainable trail building and maintenance techniques and fosters sustainable and meaningful relationships with a variety of land managers and partners. SORBA Tri-Cities is comprised of a network of more than 200 members and volunteers and encourages responsible riding, volunteer trail work, and cooperation among trail user groups and land managers. We believe the proposal to add the 5.05 miles of trail to the system of trails to be modest and fair. In addition, it clearly meets the changing needs of the Forest and your visitors with the very significant growth of mountain biking as a sustainable and healthy recreational activity.

Thank you very much for your respectful consideration of our comments. SORBA Tri-Cities’ members and leadership look forward to assisting you and Forest Service personnel in sustainably maintaining and improving the trail system within the Cherokee National Forest.

Respectfully,

Jerry Greer

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